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SUBJECT: CODEL BROWNBACK DISCUSSES TROOP LEVELS WITH KRG
PRESIDENT BARZANI

Classified By: Regional Coordinator James Yellin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: At a lunch with CODEL Brownback on January 10, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani said that he favored a reduction in Coalition Forces to as little as 50,000 and a reorientation of their mandate to training and support of the Iraqi security forces and military. Brownback noted that the U. S. would not cut and run from Iraq, but that a change in policy would be necessary in the coming year. Barzani said that the Iraqi Kurdish Region would remain part of a federal Iraq rather than risk abandonment by the U. S. if it moved toward independence. Brownback commended Barzani for his commitment to religious freedom and tolerance in the Kurdistan Region. End Summary.

Barzani Says U. S. Troop Reduction Would Benefit Iraq

[1](#)3. (C) Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani hosted a lunch for CODEL Brownback on January 10 at the Presidential palace in Salah ad-Din. Senator Brownback told President Barzani that despite the difficult security situation, the U. S. would not cut and run from Iraq. However, Senator Brownback added, the current policy has not worked and American policymakers are discussing ways to make improvements. Asked if a reduction in troops would work and what timeline might be acceptable, Barzani told Brownback that the number of troops Iraq is less important than having a clear role for them to play. Barzani added that a reduction in Coalition Forces--to as little as 50,000 troops--should take place as soon as possible and would help to stabilize the situation. According to Barzani, the U. S. had made a mistake in using its soldiers to perform a police function in Iraqi communities, and in doing so had drawn itself into the conflict between Sunni insurgents and Shia militias, making itself a target. Community policing, he said, should be performed by Iraqi security forces and by the Iraqi army.

[1](#)4. (C) Barzani continued that any dysfunctional Iraqi military and security units should be dissolved and incompetent commanders fired. Coalition Forces should provide training and play a supporting role to Iraqi forces. He said the U. S. should keep three military bases in Iraq--one in the south of Iraq, one in central Iraq, and a new one to be established in the Kurdistan Region. These bases would be a symbol of the continued U. S. presence in Iraq and serve as a deterrent to the militias, insurgents, and especially neighboring countries that seek to destabilize Iraq.

[1](#)5. (C) Brownback asked Barzani if a reduction in Coalition Forces would incite more sectarian violence. Barzani

responded that it would cause an increase in violence "for a few days," but the overall result would be a reduction in sectarian strife.

Kurds Prefer Federalism to Independence Without U. S. Ally

16. (C) In response to a question from Brownback, Barzani said that independence is the national right of the Kurdish people and that Kurdish participation in Iraq is based on a voluntary union. However, he said the Kurdish people realize that staying in a federal Iraq better serves their interests than a move toward independence in which the U. S. might abandon them.

17. (C) According to Barzani, in a federal Iraq the Sunni and Shia should each establish regional governments and parliaments in their areas to administer essential services, security, and judicial functions as the Kurds have done in the north. The central government in Baghdad should be responsible for conducting foreign policy, dealing with the destabilizing interference of neighboring countries, and ensuring equitable distribution of natural and financial resources to the three parts of Iraq.

Brownback Emphasizes Importance of Religious Freedom

18. (C) Brownback closed the conversation by noting that religious freedom and tolerance were among the most important principles for the United States. He said that the ability of Muslims and Christians to live peacefully in the Kurdistan

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Region illustrates a belief among its people in the freedom of conscience. He thanked Barzani for protecting these principles in such a tough region of the world. Brownback added that faith does not flourish except in an atmosphere of freedom.
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